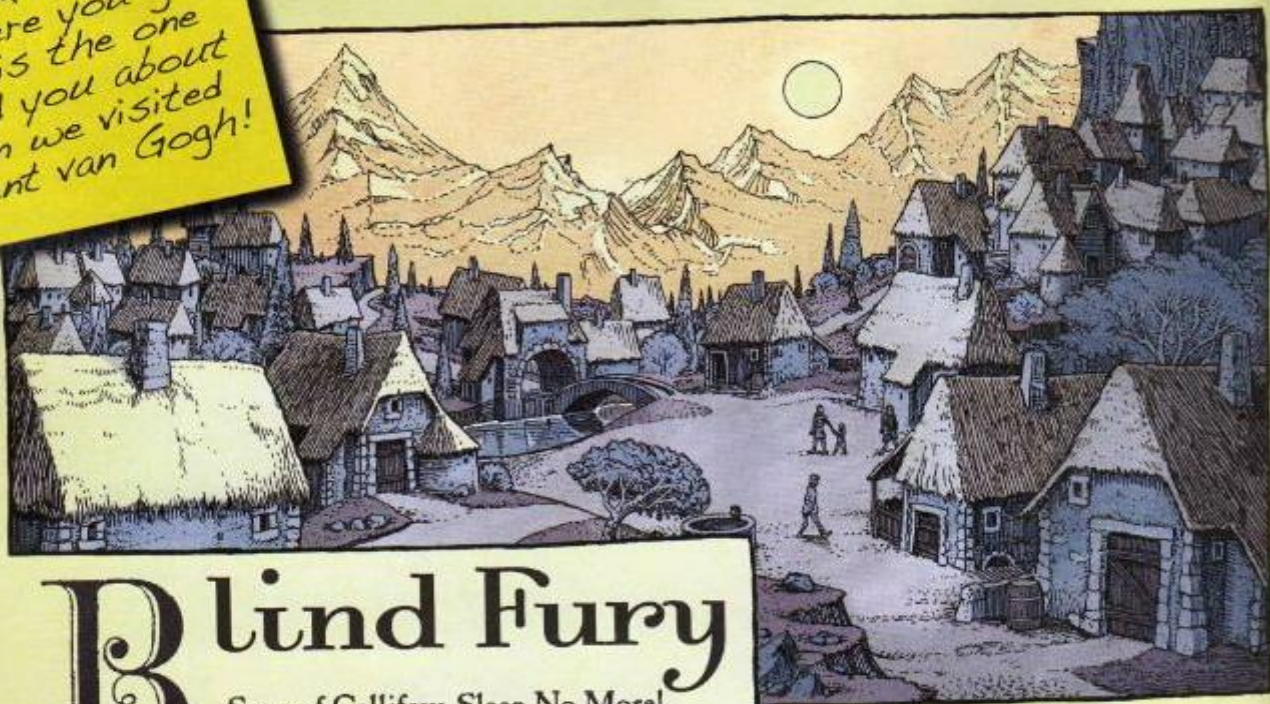


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You wanted to
know what
Gallifreyan fairytales
were like, Pond,
well, here you go!
This is the one
I told you about
when we visited
Vincent van Gogh!



Blind Fury

Sons of Gallifrey, Sleep No More!

In the Old Times, when even Rassilon was young, Death came to Gallifrey. He sent his messenger to a village in the foothills of the mountains of Outer Gallifrey.

The village was called Slothe, and the people lived up to its name. With every generation, the children became lazier than their parents. They had no thought for farming or trade, and no respect for the world around them. Why did they need to tend to crops, when the food they wanted grew in abundance in the forests and fields? Why should they bother themselves with farm animals when the wild broakir could be hunted through the foothills, and they could catch the singing yaddlefish in the rivers? The people picked the fruit from the silver-leaved ulanda trees and they raided the nests of the trunkikes for eggs and for young birds.

But for all their hunting and fishing, for all they took from the land, the people of Slothe never spared a thought to giving anything back. They enjoyed their easy lives, taking more than they needed. When the trees were bare, there were always more trees. When the river was empty, they found another. When the forest no longer echoed to the squeal of the broakir, they hunted further afield...

And over the years, the trunkikes moved to new nesting areas, and the yaddlefish swam in different rivers. The ulanda trees did not fruit and rotted away until only one was left... By their thoughtless actions, the people brought Death on themselves – brought Death's Messenger to the village of Slothe.

Three times, Death's Messenger visited Slothe. The first time, he came at night and bore away the souls of a dozen villagers. He left their bodies torn and broken. The people found their loved ones and their relatives the next day, and wept for their loss. For the first time, the people of Slothe were learning what it was to be without. They had gone without meat and without fish, without fruit and without food. Now they were losing themselves.

The second time Death's Messenger visited the people of Slothe, he came by day. But no one saw him, at least no one who lived. It was said that the people he slew saw Death's Messenger in the moment of their death. They caught glimpses of his teeth, his claws, his fury as he sought them out. They saw his shadow stretching out at sunset, and his reflection in the empty river, and they knew that Death had sent a monster to bend the villagers to his will. He passed through the village and left heartbreak and misery behind. His victims were the young, the strong, the healthy – and soon there was no one left to fight the monster.

No one, that is, except Presus, the son of the village prelate. Presus was the laziest of all the young men of Slothe. He slept until noon, and idled away the afternoons. He ate and drank the evenings away, staying up late with his friends and caring for no one but himself. Even the people of Slothe thought he was idle.

But Presus was the son of the prelate, and the strongest surviving son of Slothe. The villagers who had so far escaped the monster sent by Death came to see Presus. They came to beg him to find and kill the monster that Death had sent. But Presus sent them away.

They came again, and once more, the indolent Presus refused to listen to them. When they came a third time, Presus dismissed them and went down to the river to bathe.

He languished in the cool water for hours, giving no thought to the plight of his fellow villagers. Until, reflected in the water, he saw Death's Messenger. He saw the terrible claws and the hideous teeth. He knew that no one else had seen the grotesque creature and lived. Frightened for his life, Presus leaped from the water and ran. For all his laziness, Presus was strong and swift and silent, and he ran back to the village leaving the monster far behind.



He did not stop running until he reached his house. He closed and locked the door. Then he turned, and saw the figure standing in the shadows behind him. For an instant, Presus thought Death Himself had visited. But then he recognised the figure that stepped into the light. It was an old woman – the travelling Seer that Presus and his friends had mocked and laughed at.

The Seer was close to death. Her clothes were torn and her frail body was bleeding out its life from the wounds the monster had inflicted. Presus asked if she was hiding from Death's Messenger. But the Seer told Presus she was looking for him.

She told Presus that his life was coming to an end and that the village too was finished. But before he died he had a chance to do some good – to send the monster back to Death with a message from the village of Slothe and the people of Gallifrey. That message was that Death would not hold sway over them for ever, and that one day they would find a way to escape from Death's cold sleep. The sons of Gallifrey would sleep no more.

Her life ebbing away, the Seer took Presus out of his house, and showed him that the village was empty. While he bathed in the river, mindful only of himself, the monster had visited a third and final time. The Seer showed Presus where the last of the villagers had died at the claws of the monster. And Presus saw that the bodies were those of his own father and mother.

Then, at last, Presus understood his fate. In a blind fury, he took the long sword from the wall of the Opticon, the village meeting place. He covered his father's shield in leaves from the ulanda trees so that it shone bright silver in the light of the twin suns. When he was done, he turned to the Seer, hoping for her approval. But the old woman lay dead on the red grass outside the Opticon.



So Presus went in search of the monster alone. He followed it across the snowy slopes of the mountains, seeing its invisible footprints reflected in his shield. Finally, he tracked it to a cave at the foot of Mount Perdition.

The monster heard Presus approach. It came out of its cave, roaring and snarling. Reflected in the shield, Presus saw the monster turning this way and that as it tried to seek him out. It looked straight at him, but did nothing until Presus told the monster that he had come to send it back to its master, Death.

Then there was a mighty battle. Presus, armed with only his sword and shield, fought the monster with its claws and teeth. The young hero of Slothe watched the monster's reflection in his shield as he fought. He cut and thrust at shadows and empty air. Yet, in his shield, he saw the monster's yellow blood.



For three days and three nights they fought all across the foothills of the Mountains of Solace and Solitude. They neither slept nor rested, neither ate nor drank. Their breath came in ragged gasps, and their blood dripped from their wounds on to the white snow. But Presus fought with a blind fury brought on by the death of his parents and the fate of his whole village. He fought for them, not for himself.

For the first and last time in his short life, Presus the Indolent thought of others. He chased the monster across valleys and over hills, through forests and round lakes. He gave no quarter, felt no mercy, feared for nothing — not even his own life. Until finally, he thrust his sword deep into the monster's chest, and Death's Messenger was slain.

Then Presus threw away his shield. He broke his sword in two. Weak from the battle and from his wounds, he staggered back to the empty village of Slothe. With the last of his strength, he gathered his father and his mother and all the bodies and he built them into a great funeral pyre. It is said that when he lit it, the smoke from the fire could be seen across the whole Continent of Wild Endeavour.

As the flames died and the suns dipped below the snow-topped mountains, Presus at last rested. He lay down to sleep beside the funeral fire. And in that sleep, he dreamed of his dead father and mother and of the villagers. He dreamed of the Seer and of his fight with Death's messenger — of how he had defeated Death and fulfilled the Seer's prophecy so that the sons and daughters of Gallifrey need fear Death no more.

And Presus dreamed of the dark, shadowy figure that stood watching him through the dying flames — with an hourglass in one hand, and a broken sword in the other.

He is dreaming still.